

Sexual assaults less likely in neighborhoods where registered sex offenders live

June 23 2015, by Jared Wadley



Reported sex offenses were lower in neighborhoods where more registered sex offenders live—a finding that runs counter to public perception about residential safety.

A new study by the University of Michigan and Princeton University explored [sex offender laws](#) and the location of reported [sex crimes](#) by tracking address information of registered [sex offenders](#) in Baltimore County, Maryland.

The study's authors began with years of data for 4,100 confirmed home addresses of more than 1,500 registered [sex](#) offenders who lived in Baltimore County. Combining this information with data on reported [crimes](#) from the Baltimore County Police Department from early 1990s through part of 2009, they found that each additional sex offender living in a residential area was associated with 7.5 percent fewer sex offenses.

Researchers also analyzed changes in the patterns in reported crime after the public was able to use the online Maryland Sex Offender Registry to search for the whereabouts of convicted sex criminals.

Making a sex offender's identity and location available to the public appears to increase the likelihood of reported sex offenses in neighborhoods where the offenders lived, although crimes of forcible rape and sex offenses against children were exceptions to this pattern, said Amanda Agan, a postdoctoral research associate at Princeton and one of the study's authors.

If neighbors learn that a registered sex offender lives nearby, an individual may become more likely to report suspicious activity, the researchers said. Parents also may decide to discuss the need to report sexual abuse with their children, who in turn may be more likely to report something unusual, said J.J. Prescott, a U-M law professor and one of the study's authors.

The researchers note that the findings are based on reported crimes, not actual crimes.

The findings appear in the *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies*.

More information: "Sex Offender Law and the Geography of Victimization." (June 4, 2015). *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies* Vol. 11, No 4, December 2014; U of Michigan Law & Econ Research Paper No. 15-009. Available at SSRN: ssrn.com/abstract=2614543

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